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ABSTRACT

At the conference on American high school reform sponsored by the Council for Basic Education, three themes emerged: (1) the problems facing secondary schools have been accurately identified; (2) educators know the solutions; and (3) what is needed is the political will to implement what is known. At the conference, Professor Chester Finn described the history of American high school reform as essentially a movement between the academic objective, in which scholastic achievement is foremost; and the social objective, which considers the school responsible for the child's personal, economic, and social success. Emphasis on the latter objective has led to false expectations, in that the schools are expected to teach so much and end up teaching little. This fact was corroborated in conference participants' reports that businesses, in order to accomplish work done badly by the high schools, provide training programs for employees. Secondary school reform must stress academic improvement. The literature on school effectiveness provides information on practices that work; among these, administrator skills and educational philosophy are of primary importance. Ultimately, however, high school reform is largely a matter of political will, manifested in a shared commitment to reform within the school district and the community. (Author/MJL)

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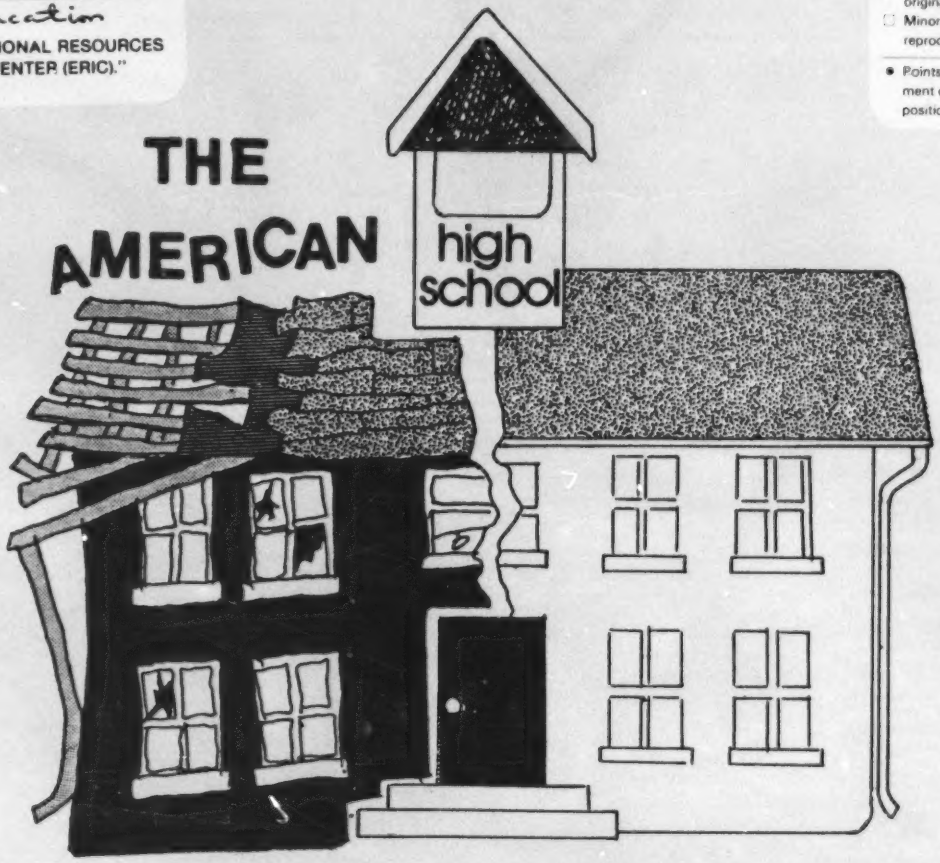

TIME FOR REFORM

A REPORT

FOR

THE COUNCIL FOR BASIC EDUCATION

by

Bruce O. Boston

January 1982

UD 022 598

FOREWORD

During the 1980s, the issue of educational quality in American high schools will probably receive as much attention as was given to equality of educational opportunity during the 1960s and '70s. The Council for Basic Education has decided to monitor developments in high school reform; a national conference in October 1981 was the first step. To provide background and perspective for the conference itself and for high school reform in general, the Council engaged the talents of a respected independent writer, Bruce O. Boston. What follows is a report of his own thoughts on the CBE conference and his reflections on the matter of reform.

Dennis Gray
Deputy Director, CBE

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I

INTRODUCTION

America is congenitally reformist. We Americans are a society and polity born in hope, and bred to the ineradicable conviction that building the bridge between today's crisis and tomorrow's opportunity is merely a matter of work, ingenuity, and will. Because our forebears had the temerity to found this nation on the audacious premise that if you don't like the way things are being run, you have a right (indeed, the moral duty) to change them, we have seldom drawn back from lesser challenges. As a society, we <u>believe</u> in reform; it is, after all, what made us what we are.

For the most part, our propensity for reform has led to progress, once we have managed to attach volition to insight. The achievements of Americans have been those of an energetic and optimistic people, made possible by tapping the reservoir of human talent resulting from the glorious gallimaufry of the world's people who have gathered here. The institution most responsible for realizing this potential has been our system of public education. Our national creed holds that liberty and ignorance are fundamentally incompatible, and that the surest way to secure the former is to defeat the latter. We have come to believe, moreover, that reform is itself fueled by education; we know from experience that teaching and learning have been essential to our vision of progress and our ability to change. They instigate change, they consummate change, they institutionalize change, and finally, they bring its progeny into the world.

Education is intrinsically a forming and reforming activity. Its <u>raison d'être</u> is to create the most fundamental changes in human beings, and through them, in society. Education's business is to hold a position at the fracture between what is and what can be, and steadily to knit them together. The fact that we engage in this activity primarily with children is at once the most courageous and the most presumptuous of all social decisions. It is presumptuous because it takes liberties with the lives of those who have virtually no choice in the matter. We subject our children to experimentation, much of it needless or heedless, to carry out the plans of adults. But this is also courageous, because it manifests our continual affirmation that individuals and society are not merely facts, but they are also tasks.

Because education is intrinsically a reforming activity, it follows that education is itself subject to reform; indeed, education is the quintessentially reflexive social act. This characteristic, combined with the ingrained predisposition of Americans to tinker with their institutions, turns our attention to school reform whenever the engine of society stalls, or (lately) even idles roughly. And for good reason. Great institutions with great purposes attract people of diverse opinions, a variety of needs, and a broad spectrum of hopes, values, and beliefs. The problem-solving ability of such institutions is always attenuated by the tendency of solutions to create the next generation of problems. Because our public education system is the most far-flung of society's works, and because it therefore attracts the greatest diversity of dreams and demands, public education and the reforming spirit go hand in hand. The relationship is, after all, reciprocal. We look to the public education system to fashion each new generation in our image; at the same time, we recognize that the reforming dynamic fostered by public education makes a truly new future possible, not just a replay of the past.

It should come as no surprise, then, that in an era of accelerated change, educational reform is again a matter of considerable attention. The events and trends of public education over the last thirty years, combined with the demands made on the schools by all manner of groups and perspectives, have created a powerful alliance. This alliance stands in opposition to the generalizations and expectations of earlier eras, even when "earlier eras" are defined as anything that happened more than five years ago. New manifestoes on the nature and aims of education are numerous in the 1980s. The public schools were the battleground where the fractious domestic conflicts of the 1960s were fought, a process not completed even now. To many, the hopes that the schools would be found in the van, vindicating their theories about teaching, learning, and society itself, has proved empty. As the evidence began to pile up in the 1970s that the schools were failing to educate large numbers of students successfully, expectation gave way to recrimination, and schools became scapegoats.

In the last few years, secondary school reform has thus emerged as a matter of increasingly greater attention and concern. Fresh theories have been advanced, alarums raised, symposia held, task forces commissioned, foundations importuned, and projects launched. For every decline in test scores, the complaints have gone up a decibel. As if on cue, a circle of blame has gathered in the school yard: parents pointing to school boards, pointing to administrators, pointing to teachers, pointing to children, who can only point to themselves and ask,"Who, me?" Is it the fault of the curriculum or the dwindling tax base? Is it the unions? The lack of accountability? Where did it go wrong? Was it ever right?

With the public discussion close to becoming a shouting match, the Council for Basic Education determined to search for a still small voice of consensus. Its 1981 national conference on "The American High School: Time for Reform" had the Council's own bias built into the title. The consistent issue for the Council, of course, has never been whether school reform was a good idea, but rather the nature of the changes to be made and how long they might take. Over 200 Council members, educators, citizens, and journalists met in Washington, D.C. on October 30, 1981 to consider secondary school reform. Their agenda was not to come up with a reform program. Rather, the purpose of the conference was to achieve some understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of today's high schools and their graduates, to examine appropriate standards, and to probe the contours of what more than one speaker called "the educational issue of the 1980s." The idea was to give participants some idea of what actually was going on in high school reform, as opposed to listening to horror stories that would elicit the obvious conclusion that something ought to be done.

This document is, in part, a report on the conference, but not in the sense of providing the reader with a book of "proceedings," summarizing the remarks of each speaker and panelist, instructive as such an exercise might be. While communicating the sense of what the presenters had to say, this report attempts to stretch beyond what was said at the conference to suggest some thoughts arising from what was not said as well -- or what might have been said in a louder voice.

Certain themes have emerged from my reflections on the subject of high school reform. They were not so much themes for the conference itself as they are the inferences I have drawn from it. Without attributing my own thinking to speakers whose remarks have prompted them, I have taken the liberty to organize much of what was said -- and unsaid -- around the following axioms:

- The problems facing the secondary schools in America have been accurately described and diagnosed; we know what's wrong.
- We already know how to correct much of what's wrong; we can educate our children better than we are currently doing.
- What we lack, mostly, is the political will to implement what we know.

II

THE PROBLEM

In Historical Perspective

In his luncheon presentation to the CBE conference,[1] Professor Chester Finn of Vanderbilt University placed the current concern with high school reform in a historical context that, while providing perspective, also underscored a sense of urgency felt by many.

Following the interpretation by G. Stanley Hall, Finn outlined the history of American secondary school reform as essentially a movement between two poles, the social and the academic. On one hand, secondary school reform has taken a "scholiocentric" approach, in which the dominant purpose is to fit the child to the school. Subject matter is taken as given. Specific measures of scholastic achievement are stipulated and used as gatekeepers for progression from one stage to the next. Acquiring knowledge about specific subjects is stressed, particularly as these are shaped by the academic disciplines traditional to higher education. The scholiocentric approach is strong in its commitment to the development of cognitive skills in children.

On the other hand is the "pedocentric" approach, advocated by reformers who want the school fitted to the child. Proponents of this view hold the school responsible for overcoming whatever barriers intervene between the pupil and social and economic success; the barriers are treated as educational problems. Education thus becomes, quite overtly, a means for moving the society toward more egalitarian, tolerant, and humane goals.

These two divergent emphases, Finn pointed out, were classically delineated for public schools in 1893 and 1918. Just before the turn of the century, the "Committee of Ten," organized under the auspices of the National Education Association and chaired by Harvard's Charles W. Eliot, issued the prototypical call for scholiocentric academic reform. The Committee prescribed the four-year high school curriculum that, with modification, has substantially characterized American secondary education since. Its goals were mental discipline and prowess; its means were the courses contained in the standardized course of study. Far from being elitist, its defenders argued, the scholiocentric impulse was fundamentally democratic because it assumed everyone should get the best possible secondary education inasmuch as few could afford college. The report of the Committee of Ten became a standard against which schools measured their instructional policies for decades.

Another NEA report (1918), the "Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education," has served as a counterpoint to its famous predecessor. It became, in effect, the founding document for the pedocentric approach to reform. The Cardinal Principles stated that the job of the schools was to "...develop in each individual the knowledge, interests, ideals, habits, and powers [to] find ...and use his place to shape both himself and society to ever nobler ends." Education was to be both continuous and universal. Passing from its accustomed position as merely a feeder institution for colleges and universities, the high school was presented as the centerpiece of the entire public education system. It became an agency endowed with an ever-expanding mandate for meeting more and more social -- understood as educational -- problems.

Each of these documents became the progenitor of successive generations of reform proposals. According to the Committee of Ten, leaving high school was a sign of academic mastery; according to the Cardinal Principles, it meant having acquired the requisite personal and social attainments to warrant continuation along the path of growth and development in other contexts.

This history helps one to see recent events in a different context. The social perspective held sway until the 1950s, when the views of James Bryant Conant began to be heard, abetted by the national state of emergency inspired by Sputnik I. The response to the Soviet satellite was the National Defense Education Act (1958), which seemed to come from a rigorously academic perspective. There was, it was naively thought, a correlation among the number of space satellites launched, the number of college students studying calculus, and the number of high school students studying algebra. But the NDEA was a two-edged sword. It offered a highly significant Federal commitment to the sciences, mathematics, and foreign languages -- in the name of national defense. On the other hand there was a largely unexamined premise lying behind this legislation. Following as it did the Brown v. Topeka Board of Education decision, which had the effect of asking schools to solve America's race problems, the NDEA reinforced the notion that the job of "fixing" what has gone wrong "out there" is a matter for public education. NDEA was the first of a long series of education laws, stretching into the late 1970s, all built on the same idea -- that the best place to solve society's problems is on society's training ground, the schools. What started as a strengthening of basic subjects served to burden schools with the manifold tasks of social reconstruction.

When the 1960s brought a parade of new missions into the schools, the basic business of teaching and learning could not but decline. In Finn's words:

> Simple expansion to accommodate the children of the "baby-boom" would have been challenge enough. But, in addition, the schools were drafted to fight the war on poverty; the war on racial discrimination; the war on sexism; the war on bad driving; the war on malnutrition; the war on unemployment; and countless other wars, battles, and scrimmages. The schools fought willingly, bravely, and within the limits of their abilities, competently. Few noticed that they could not win a lot of battles when they were deployed across so many fronts.[2]

By the time A. Harry Passow's survey of five school reform projects appeared in 1976,[3] some sobering conclusions could be drawn about what actually constituted school reform. In his report, Passow pointed to such reform proposals as reducing age group segregation; increasing teenagers' knowledge of the roles of parent, spouse, and citizen; enhancing self-knowledge; developing alternative schools; strengthening something called "action learning"; eliminating sexism; and the like. What Passow found missing were references to reforming the educational act itself. "Basic curricular questions, such as what should be taught, to whom, when, how, under what circumstances, by whom and using what resources, and evaluated in what fashion" were at best tackled "only implicitly."[4]

Today a new round of (at least) six high school reform projects is underway, each consciously designed to alter what happens in American education. All six of these projects are distinctly different from the efforts examined by Passow in that they focus exactly on the elements he found missing -- what is taught, by whom, how. They will be presented briefly as part of a discussion about Solutions. What is important about these projects in a historical perspective is their contrast with the dominant conceptions of high school reform that have held the field for the last two decades. These new efforts appear to be harbingers of a revivified concern for -- and more significantly, an attempt to implement -- <u>academic</u> reform in the secondary schools.

Whether these latter attempts are to be more than a mere harkening back to the agenda of the Committee of Ten is not yet discernible; the projects are still in their infancy. What is hoped is that these efforts, and others that will surely follow in their train, will establish a much clearer agenda for American education in the years ahead. If we are fortunate, the movement for secondary school reform will do more than redress the imbalance brought on by excessive pedocentrism. The reform movement now gathering steam has the potential, at least, to reduce greatly the contentiousness and oscillation that have victimized

a large number of secondary school students in recent years. After a century of secondary school education, it is becoming clearer that scholiocentrism v. pedocentrism is an unnecessary, and probably fruitless, opposition. The value of the dichotomy lies much more in its descriptive power than in its utility as an order of battle. Thus, a large part of the task for any reform movement at the secondary level will be to develop a creative and practical synthesis that moves beyond the abstraction of bipolar options.

But such a synthesis will require more than a handy set of terms to describe what is going on. It will require a clear statement of the symptoms of the illness that troubles secondary education, and of the causes of the disease itself.

Reform: Symptoms and Causes

Finn's look at the broad outlines of secondary school reform is instructive, however, not only because it helps orient the discussion, but also because it provides a basis for understanding the remarks of other presenters.

The morning panel was titled "The High School Diploma: What Does It Mean?" It was here that many of the symptomatic problems facing would-be reformers of the secondary schools were described. Addressing the question were representatives of three very different "consumers" of high school graduates: Dr. Gerald B. Kauvar, the Special Assistant for Education in the Department of Defense; Ms. Anne Wingate, the Vice President for Planning and Research of the Connecticut Business and Industry Association; and Dr. John T. Casteen III, the Dean of Admissions at the University of Virginia.[5]

The armed forces, Kauvar informed the conference, spend some $12 billion annually on education and training: $60 million went to teach basic reading skills in FY 1980. This catch-up activity occupies the time of fully one-sixth of the people in the armed forces. Ill-prepared young people present an increasingly critical problem. Although the Department of Defense would prefer not to have to do as much remediation as it is compelled to do, the high school diploma does have some value. Chiefly, Kauvar stated, the diploma is a useful predictor, not (as one might think) because it is an index of intellectual achievement, but because it is a certificate of a trait the armed forces value highly in the remediation context -- persistence. He cited studies showing that diploma holders experience much lower attrition rates than nongraduates. What the high school diploma indicates to the Department of Defense is that graduates cost less to train, perform better on the job, are more readily motivated, and make a better adjustment to military life than nongraduates. The various services are still put to a great deal of trouble, however, because they must offer basic skills programs to repair deficiencies among enlistees

who cannot read at ninth, seventh, and even fifth grade levels, even though they may have a high school diploma.

The heavy investment required to simplify job training materials, and the somewhat distressing fact that the Pentagon has, perforce, become a national leader in the research on teaching basic skills, are disappointing. Furthermore, they represent an enormous, costly redundancy. The implication of Kauvar's remarks was quite clear: for the armed forces, the inductee with a diploma is preferred to one without it, but the Department of Defense would far prefer being in the defense business to being forced to do the work of the schools.

The perspective of business and industry on the value of the high school diploma, and the preparedness of graduates to meet the needs of employers, were discussed by Anne Wingate. The need for communications skills (reading, writing, speaking) continues unabated for all entry-level positions in the business and industrial world, she reported. And it is no longer true (if it ever was) that the "tough subjects" are required only of the college bound. Often overlooked, she said, is the fact that familiarity with algebra and geometry is a necessity for a master machinist -- of which there is a national shortage.

But, as in the case of the armed forces, the educational preparedness of young people graduating directly into the work force is placing an unaccustomed -- and costly -- burden on the nation's economy. More and more companies are conducting not only training programs, but basic education as well, again, not because they want to, but because their own needs force it on them. The conference participants, for the second time in ten minutes, were faced directly with the overwhelming fact of redundancy. Quite simply, we are paying for the same thing twice.

As an example of the frustration felt by many employers, Wingate pointed to one of Connecticut's major firms, which is currently considering starting its own company high school as an alternative to public schooling. In the long run, management figures, it would be cheaper. Companies, Wingate reported, simply do not understand why the public schools do not establish the mastery of minimum skills as standards for graduation. Companies do not consider it too much to ask when they expect a graduate to be able to handle fractions, decimals, and percentages; or a reading ability that allows direct training without remediation; or the ability to write a coherent English paragraph. Business and industry fully expect, she said, to have to <u>train</u> people for higher skills, and they expect to have to <u>retrain</u> workers in future years. Although they accept that responsibility, they "do not accept or understand school systems that do not place basic skills as minimum goals for all students."

John Casteen, speaking as an admissions dean at a selective state university, saw patches of blue sky behind the clouds, though not many. He noted a strong sense of academic purpose among those high school graduates seeking preparation for business and engineering careers. The weakest sense of academic purpose (ominously) was among those preparing for teaching careers. In general, he said, few high school students are able to give an account of what their high school education is really for. Although he noted some strengths among the graduates applying for admission (e.g., outstanding students working to improve their schools, credentials reflecting higher achievement in some cases, declining provincialism among secondary schools), there were still some characteristic weaknesses that occasioned great concern:

- there has been a ten-year slump in the number of "academic solids" appearing on high school transcripts, and the typical student comes with relatively little in the way of foreign language, complex mathematics, or science;

- "applied" and "alternative" learning at the high school level almost always means diminished content and consequently diminished learning;

- there is too much pass/fail grading, depriving both students and evaluators of "hard-edged measures of competence"; and

- there is an increase in poor writing among applicants, to the extent that the typical application essay betrays both an inability to organize material and a high incidence of formal errors.

Reasons for this decline were not difficult for Casteen to find. Grade inflation gives colleges false information and deludes students by holding out false hopes. Trivial curricula offer "easier, flashier ways to get through school with less effort and less achievement." Curricular abbreviation fosters less time devoted to learning, loads nonacademic chores onto classroom hours, and places academically peripheral activities ahead of formal study.

The upshot for the university is the same as for the armed forces and business. According to Casteen, "Colleges in the course of the last fifteen years have repeatedly lowered both their graduation requirements and their entry requirements.... Remediation is now the rule on virtually every campus in the United States, and often for 25-40% of enrolled freshman students." Fewer than a third of all remedial students graduate.

But Casteen did not point a finger at the secondary schools without uttering a "mea culpa" from the campus. The colleges, he said, had themselves failed to assert the leadership that would tell students what a high school education should be. The result has been an increasing number of students who "mean well but struggle ineffectually" to accomplish what they should. He called for a "genuine empiricism" in the public schools, for "hard and honest answers of success or its opposite."

The remarks of these "consumers" of the product of our high schools all point in the same direction. To the degree that their portrayal is accurate, secondary education in this country is fast becoming the initial element in a massive exercise in redundancy. Before they can get on with their proper tasks, colleges, business and industry, and the military are increasingly forced to accomplish work done badly by the high schools. The social, economic, and human expense involved in this repetitiveness is staggering, incalculable. The cost to society of failing to educate a growing number of children to competency by age 18 is already far too high in terms of lost minds, lost abilities, lost creativity, and lost productivity. The remediation required to recapture a small proportion of this waste is a classic case of throwing good money and time after bad. Our society simply cannot afford such profligacy.

One is prompted to ask: "Why do we keep on doing this? Why do we allow our schools to function as weathervanes for every wind of educational doctrine that comes blowing up the valley of sociological analysis? Why do we insist that the schools scratch every cultural itch? Why do we allow our schools to prepare children so poorly to take positive and productive roles as workers, students of higher education, and citizens?" To say we allow all this because our hands are tied by a lack of resources and competing priorities simply begs the question. Resources are always scarce and priorities always compete, but resource allocations and the arrangement of priorities are based on decisions.

One answer lies in the history of secondary school reform, which suggests that we are now trapped in a particular way of thinking about secondary schools and their function -- one that assumes a particularly virulent form of pedocentrism. We insist on making the schools more answerable for the personal, economic, and social success of the child than for the child's learning. This fact, when combined with the ubiquity of the schools, makes public education the most convenient resting place imaginable for all sorts of jobs that have very little to do with education. After all, the argument goes, isn't the best way to solve social problems to nip them in the bud, to educate our children out of social difficulties <u>before</u> those difficulties have a chance to

graduate to the status of "problems"? Aren't the schools really the best places to instruct our children in safety, health, good manners, the "world of work," the danger of drug abuse, pet care, and how to shop using unit pricing?

Using the schools as a catch-all solver of social problems, whether trivial or intractable, can lead only in the direction of paralysis; the schools are expected to teach so much they wind up unable to teach much of anything. This is a core issue with which the secondary school reform movement must come to terms.

Another unanswered question, or perhaps another way of putting the same question more sharply, is: "What are schools for?" Here is an answer from Diane Ravitch, the eminent historian of education:

> The schools must concentrate on doing well what they are fitted to do best. The schools are the only community agency in which young people may gain a liberal education, an education that emphasizes intellectual growth and prepares students to assume the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a free society. Even if nothing else were to change, the reordering of the schools' priorities would itself constitute an important reform in secondary education.[6]

In such a context and perspective, educational reform is quickly liberated from the task of social rescue and is freed for the task of improving teaching and learning.

That the schools have been subverted by misplaced expectations is, in a perverse way, laughable. The farther we get from what the schools are good at -- or could become good at if we let them -- the greater the chance is that they will fail to produce what we know our society will degenerate without -- people who can talk, think, learn, evaluate, and decide intelligently. The school day is, after all, finite; there are only so many instructional hours to go around. Every minute accorded to nonessential learning is lost to the subjects that foster what the Council for Basic Education refers to as "generative power," i.e., the power within the student to learn whatever lessons life may offer or require.

It is useful to reflect that we rarely expect other institutions to reform themselves to do tasks that go beyond their intrinsic functions. We do not expect charitable organizations to eliminate poverty but to ameliorate it. We do not ask industry to keep the streets clean but to produce manufactures. We expect government to keep the peace, not the faith; churches, the faith, not the peace. Yet we exhibit little reluctance in

asking public education in general, and the secondary schools in particular, to act as a surrogate for the family, or as a training ground for all manner of vocations, or as an inculcator of various ethnic heritages, or even as a psychological halfway house for troubled adolescents. Why do we do it?

There are reasons. One, of course, is that rationales for the involvement of the high school are devilishly easy to fabricate. Given a correlation between education and some observed problem, it is a short step to positing a cause-effect relationship, and the interpretation that the correlation exists <u>because</u> the high school fell down on the job, and that it therefore ought to repair the damage. This is bad logic that produces bad education.

Another obvious reason is that the high school is pervasive; it touches the lives of everyone. The argument that it is therefore the <u>best</u> (or at least a suitable) place to fulfill the wishes of those who believe they have a claim on public education, however, is a logical jump that ought to give educators fits of rational distemper. The argument leads inevitably to a pedagogy of convenience, against which the high school is only beginning to mount an effective defense. It is time to do so, before the weight becomes too much to bear. Omnipresence is not the same thing as omnipotence.

A third reason that we inflict inappropriate demands on high schools springs from a more worthy rationale. We expect so much from them because they really are, at root, in the business of changing people, i.e., helping young people make the transition from ignorance to knowledge and from childhood to adulthood. If this is the case, the argument runs, the schools ought to take on the management of as many of those troublesome changes as possible. But this reasoning, too, rests on a faulty generalization. It is as if we assumed that anyone who can play football can, indeed <u>should</u>, also play soccer, on grounds that both games involve eleven players, use a leather ball, and have the playing time divided into halves. If high schools are relatively successful at preparing young people to become competent adults, it is because useful knowledge and skills can be acquired there. It does not follow that every skill for which the rationale "it is useful" can be constructed falls into the domain of the secondary school. The secondary school should not automatically become responsible for <u>every</u> change in adolescents, no matter how desirable, simply because it is the place where <u>particular</u> changes can be effected.

This line of counterargument suggests a final reason that secondary schools have enforced duties for which they are ultimately unsuited. Schools are the victims of their own success.

By and large, they do meet (or appear to meet) the multitude of the expectations laid on them by the public. If the participants in the CBE conference needed any reminding on that score, Dr. John W. Porter, President of Eastern Michigan University and former chief state school officer in Michigan, provided it in his keynote speech. Reversing Marc Antony's strategem, he came not to bury the high schools but to praise them. The American high school, he reminded his audience, has been traditionally "...reactive, not proactive....over the past three decades it has responded to virtually every call for greater access and greater participation." He offered an even more detailed bill of particulars. "Over the past thirty years:

> "...with the protection of Federal troops in the 1950s, the high school responded by providing greater access to minorities;
>
> ...with direction from state and Federal laws and courts, the high school responded to provide greater access to the handicapped;
>
> ...under pressure, the high school has considerably relaxed student conduct codes and established student rights and responsibility standards;
>
> ...the high school has taken significant steps forward in a number of states to provide shared centers for skill development."[7]

Many public high schools, he argued, have accommodated these and other (uncatalogued) changes in the only way they really could -- by reducing their academic standards, by modifying codes of discipline, by liberalizing grading, by inflating the curriculum with mini-courses, and by rendering "truancy" an obsolete concept.

The high school has thus become prey to its own adaptability. It is the prototypical "one size fits all" of social institutions. Like a vast sponge, it has absorbed task after task, until it is now simply engorged. Almost unnoticed, it has reached its limit. The American high school, like the supply of fossil fuels, turns out to be a finite resource. The legitimate mission of the high school in today's society is a difficult enough assignment. But to ask it to do everything from reducing vandalism and teenage pregnancy on the one hand, to breaking down linguistic barriers while preserving ethnic heritage on the other, is to invoke the Law of the Straw and the Camel.

The proposition that the American high school is overworked and underpaid would not effect a very large division of the

house; it certainly did not among those who gathered under CBE's auspices to consider the prospects for reformation. Nor would many doubt the suggestion (endorsed here) that unless this massive weight of misplaced expectations is lifted from the secondary schools, their marginal effectiveness will diminish further. The problem is clear, both in its fundamental form of misplaced expectations and in the form of various epiphanies, from declining test scores to scandalous dropout rates, from the redundancy of remediation to the frightening number of diploma-holding functional illiterates, from junk-food curricula to burned-out teachers.

We also know what many of the remedies for these symptoms are. We know how to marshall energies and solve the problems of educational breakdown at the secondary level. Thus, from consensus about the problem we can move to consensus about answers.

III

SOLUTIONS

We know what's broken. Surprisingly, there is a great deal of agreement on how to fix it. When the discussion turns to educational reform in general, and high school reform in particular, there is hope. It is worth remarking that most of the conference speakers announced themselves as optimistic about high school reform. Why? Because researchers have discovered many of the things that make for an effective school -- one that successfully teaches basic content and skills to all students -- and because there is a rising national consciousness that the need for improving secondary schools is urgent.

Working on the assumption that secondary school reform must be grounded in academic improvement, we already know a lot about how to proceed. We know what approaches and techniques can help turn around a given school, even a given school district.

Although the conference fell short of making the point explicit, the most astonishing thing about high school reform is how little and how seldom we act on what we do know to be effective. There is, for example, very little disagreement to the general proposition that we owe it to our secondary students to use successful educational approaches and proven instructional techniques. Unfortunately, it is still the case, as education writer Robert Benjamin points out, that "American education tends to measure the worth of instruction programs not by their results but by their agreement with prevailing notions about how children should be taught."[8] One is sadly reminded of the joke about the economist being someone who, when he finds something that works in practice, wonders if it will work in theory. One lesson, at least, is clear. Unless we are prepared to structure schooling on the basis of proven outcomes, educational reform will remain a Cheshire Cat, a vacuous grin of theory lingering after the body has faded away.

We know, for example, that no classrooom behavior under the control of the teacher correlates more highly with learning than time students spend directly engaged. Yet, as any visitor to a high school can point out, the proportion of student time spent in aimless waiting, or in transitions between tasks, is mind-numbing. One index of the seriousness of secondary school reformers will therefore be how much attention they pay to increasing the time dedicated to concentrated learning and reducing the amount of learning time that is squandered.

We also know that a learner sits at every desk in every high school classroom in America. But the fact remains that many teachers still do not expect certain students to be able to learn; this remains a serious obstacle to reform, particularly in urban secondary schools. A former official of the U.S. Office of Technology Assessment and now a Vice President of Union Carbide, Lloyd Cooke, illustrates the point well from his experience as a participant in a reform project involving twenty-nine of New York City's high schools. Robert Benjamin recounts Cooke's words:

> Most teachers don't believe that all children can learn. They are tyrannized by the normal curve of distribution; there's nothing much in their background or much on record to enable them to consider kids in any other way. It frightens them, so you do it in steps. First, you tell them they're going to add a few things to what they normally do.... Then you give them time to get some results. Once they see that their students can learn, then they begin to believe it.[9]

From the literature about school effectiveness and the studies done on the teacher-pupil relationship, we are aware of other practices that "work," from mastery learning to an expanding catalogue of teacher behaviors that enhance or exhibit students' learning. None of this is new, but in the context of secondary school reform, two additional factors deserve more than passing mention. First, there is near universal agreement that the principal is crucial to the success of any high school reform effort, and second, the educational attitude, or philosophy, that shapes the district-wide program is also supremely important.

The role of the principal was given little more than passing mention at the CBE conference; it deserves better. That the principal must function as an instructional leader first, and as anything else (including administrator) second, has become a battle cry of educational reform in general and secondary reform in particular.[10] If school reform is to occur at all, let alone work well, the principal must be an educator who shapes the curriculum, supervises and maintains academic standards, counsels and evaluates teachers, introduces new techniques and research findings, recruits and cultivates the best possible staff, and sets high expectations for all. Chester Finn speaks for many observers on the subject of the principal:

> The principal is the chief protector of educational internalities. Certainly his leadership cannot be taken for granted. Too many principals are those whose only formal preparations for an executive role were some cookbook courses offered by the educational

> administration department of the local teachers' college. Too many principals are people whose foremost value is not rocking the boat.... A considerable amount of training and retraining of principals is called for.... The principals themselves -- and their curriculum directors, department heads, and other academic subordinates -- are going to have to put themselves out for a year or two, or for several consecutive summers, to modernize, strengthen, and burnish their own skills (if high school reform is to be successful).[11]

In corroboration of Finn's remarks, a 1979 study done at the University of Indiana reviewed fifty-nine cases of exceptionally successful urban schools. The most frequently reported variable was the leadership style of the principal. More specifically, these case studies indicated that effective principals:

- take strong initiative in identifying and articulating goals and priorities for their schools. They run their schools rather than allowing them to be run by force of habit;
- understand the school's instructional program inside out and make this their first priority;
- spend about half their time in the halls and the classrooms;
- care more about academic progress than collegial relations with staff members;
- hand-pick their own staff, even when they have to fight bureaucracies and unions to do it; and
- like good teachers, set standards in the form of high expectations for both staff and students.[12]

The extent of the problem we may be facing as we try to find this kind of instructional leadership to direct high school reform at the local level is well documented. To the extent, for instance, that secondary principalships are filled from within the ranks, a 1979 study of 1,600 elementary school principals offers cold comfort. Although more than 80 percent of the respondents claimed primary responsibility for the instructional program in their schools, only about a quarter said they had any influence on district-wide decisions affecting their schools. Startlingly, more than 18 percent of the sample had not had a single day of elementary teaching experience, and another 4 percent had had less than a year's experience. Fewer than half the respondents indicated that, if they had it to do over again, they would become principals.[13]

This portrait of powerlessness, poor preparation, and above all, career dissatisfaction is discouraging. One has to wonder: if the elementary principalship is in such a state, can the secondary principalship be far different? The unasked question here is the familiar one about accountability. If improving the instructional program is the beating heart of secondary school reform, and the principal's ability to provide instructional leadership is the critical factor, why are competency standards for principals so low? Can they be elevated? Why do principals feel left out when it comes to shaping district-wide instructional policy? One may object, as many principals will, that the overwhelming burdens of paperwork and administration constitute formidable blocks to concentrating on being instructional leaders. That is true. But it is also true that many principals quite simply make other choices, giving instruction short shrift while expending their energies elsewhere. Perhaps it's a question of the source from which principals would rather take the heat.

How effective a principal can be will not merely depend on the leadership exerted at the building level on a day-to-day basis. The attitude and philosophy of the district, its superintendent, and its board are also crucial. Although educational philosophies in the broad sense are as plentiful as pigeons in a public park, a self-consciously reforming educational perspective is rare.

Probably not as rare as the Great Auk, however. One of the most closely attended (and envied) presenters at the CBE conference was James E. Enochs, Assistant Superintendent of the Modesto (California) City Schools. Enochs made no bones about "where he was coming from," and he meant "from" with a capital "F":

> Seven years ago, Modesto City Schools was a typical California school system: poor but hip. In the name of innovation and relevancy, we suspended all common sense and embraced the fashionable twaddle of John Holt, Herbert Kohl, A. S. Neill, Jonathan Kozol, Edgar Friedenberg, and others. We came pretty close to substituting the Seven Deadly Sins for the Eight Cardinal Principles.
>
> Rather than be thought rigid in a period when flexibility was the highest virtue, we first relaxed our standards -- and when that didn't do it -- we abolished them completely. [14]

After a depressing series of school years marked by bloated grades, social promotion, unearned diplomas, declining achievement, plummeting morale, and screaming parents, Modesto

decided it had little left to lose. Taking a cue from John Gardner, that "the best kept secret in America is that people would rather work hard for something they believe in than enjoy a pampered idleness,"[15] Modesto decided, in 1976, to turn itself around. Its watchword was the addition of a fourth "R" -- "responsibility" -- to the instructional program. A statement of eight principles not only served to reorient the thinking of the entire district, it became a set of marching orders as well. Modesto's reform agenda was remarkably brief and comprehensive:

I. It is essential that a public institution clearly define itself; to say unequivocally what it stands for.

II. The development of responsible adults is a task requiring community commitment. It cannot be left solely to the public schools.

III. The principal tasks of the schools cannot be achieved if a disproportionate amount of time and resources must be given to maintaining order. Public schools are not obliged to serve students who, through persistent and serious acts, disrupt school and violate the rights of others.

IV. Parents must consistently support the proposition that students have responsibilities as well as rights, and that schools have an obligation to insist on both.

V. High performance takes place in a framework of high expectations.

VI. The full responsibility for learning cannot be transferred from the student to the teacher.

VII. There is nothing inherently undemocratic in requiring students to do things that are demonstrably good for them.

VIII. In order for a program to succeed, it must be kept in place for a reasonable period of time and be assured of continued support, despite periodic criticism and the lure of faddishness.

The success of these principles, and of the Modesto model, is documented in Enochs's The Restoration of Standards: The Modesto Plan,[16] but some supplementary detail is worth noting here. In 1979-80, nearly 80 percent of Modesto's students were at or above grade level in reading and math. Its college-bound seniors were scoring 25-30 points above the national means on the verbal and math portions of the SAT. On the state-mandated

California Assessment Program, its students were exceeding, by as much as 30-40 points, their expectancy bands. Ninety-seven percent of the high school seniors now pass a full battery of six competency tests and complete a required sequence of three prescribed graduation plans. Even average daily attendance is 7 percent above the state average!

Modesto's experience is strong evidence that when a district takes its purpose and results seriously, then defines clearly what it wants, and enlists the assistance it needs from parents and the community to support reform, great things can be accomplished. The successes of programs like Modesto's, and the fact that we know what to do and ways to do it, are encouraging indeed. There are grounds for optimism. It is not necessary to remain immobilized by nostalgia ("High schools were a lot better when we had teachers like old Miss Vandevoort..."). It is possible to build an educational future worthy of our vision.

Reform Projects: Grounds for Optimism

Another round of reform projects is gathering steam, and we will learn more about the nuts and bolts of high school reform as the project reports are made public during the mid-1980s. Aside from the current descriptive studies on the massive scale of Coleman's and Goodlad's, there are six national projects now working consciously to change what is happening in American secondary education. All are directly concerned with the high school, with what is taught there, and with what is being learned. Significantly, all aim at academic reform. Participants in the CBE conference were fortunate in being able to hear interim reports on three of these projects; three others were not represented. Among the absent projects were:

I. Mortimer Adler and his associates are now completing their Paideia Proposal, an endeavor with no less a goal than the reinvention of universal schooling for the United States, with heavy emphasis on curriculum content, teaching methods, and teacher preparation.

II. Stephen K. Bailey and several colleagues, working under the auspices of the National Academy of Education, are well into their preparation of a volume tentatively titled An Education of Value, which will examine thoroughly the value structure of education in general, with particular reference to those values on which secondary education should rest. Their aim is to prescribe the elements of such an education.

III. Theodore Sizer's and Arthur Powell's "A Study of High Schools" is likely to complement the work of Adler, Bailey, and their colleagues. Sponsored by both the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Independent Schools,

> the project aims at a complete reexamination of the purposes of secondary education, and a review of the entire high school curriculum. The analytical heart of the project will be a close examination of the "triad" of teacher, pupil, and subject.

Conference participants were able to hear more extended discussion about the three other projects from panelists Michael O'Keefe, Vice President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; Gordon Cawelti, Executive Director of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; and George H. Hanford, President of the College Board. Their afternoon panel discussion addressed the question, "How Can We Bring About Reform?"[17]

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has launched a "Study of the American High School," which will synthesize previous findings on high school reform. In addition, the study will present the results of the efforts of twenty-six field workers who are now observing reform efforts in fifteen high schools. The report is due in 1983. According to O'Keefe, the project will offer a status report on four main areas: (1) the accomplishments of secondary education, (2) observed problems, (3) their relative importance, and (4) how educators are moving to solve them. Ironically, O'Keefe pointed out, we are in a position -- for the first time -- to show what makes for good secondary school reform from direct research.

One significant difference between the current Carnegie study and other, similar reform efforts is that Carnegie is committed to 150 school improvement grants for self-study based on the results of this initial investigation, and 10-15 grants of up to $150,000 each for schools to launch local reform projects.

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development is now cooperating with a seventeen-school network on problems of curriculum revision as a key to secondary school reform. They are asking the fundamental question: "What knowledge is of most worth?" As Gordon Cawelti explained, the joint effort is acting on a wide base of knowledge gained from the literature of curriculum reform, which suggests the need to cluster five main areas to form a core curriculum at the secondary level: the sciences; the study of social problems; developmental studies in culture; the arts; and the "symbolics of information," i.e., mathematics and language. From these clusters essential curriculum elements can then be drawn to fit individual learning needs, a balanced approach to learning can be constructed, and a flexible approach to the demands of society on curricula can be developed that is both responsive and responsible.

The College Board also reported briefly on its project. George H. Hanford outlined the overall goal as seeking to enlist both colleges and high schools in a concerted campaign to achieve two objectives: (1) to strengthen the quality of secondary education (2) without losing any of the hard-won ground of equality of educational opportunity gained over the past twenty to twenty-five years. "Project EQuality" is designed to serve both Equality and Quality. The project's wager is that an initial emphasis on academic aspects of secondary schooling will produce the foundation for programs of quality in other aspects of education. Focusing on its traditional concern, the transition to college and the college preparatory curriculum, Project EQuality has already defined six subject-matter areas that parallel those traditionally emphasized by CBE and stressed also in the Paideia Proposal and the ASCD project: English, math, history, social science, foreign language, natural science, and the arts. Also of prime importance to Project EQuality are six basic competencies which form a kind of grid when overlaid on the subject areas: reading, writing, listening and speaking, math, reasoning, and studying. In 1982, the project will sponsor twenty-four "dialogues" between college and school academics to define a basic curriculum for the six subjects already mentioned. One hoped-for outcome is that colleges and universities will adopt the competencies and the curriculum as their preferred standards of preparation for higher education.

We will not be able to assess any of these reform projects for some time. But the fact that they share so many similarities is encouraging. Among the three projects reported on at the conference, all have a heartening focus on academic reform. All three, to varying degrees, view the curriculum as a critical reform element. There is a tendency toward curricular prescriptiveness (stronger in the ASCD and College Board projects) that seems necessary to counteract the kind of curricular dispersion pointed out by many critics of secondary education. The Carnegie Foundation's effort appears to have a somewhat more global cast. Its strongly data-based approach is likelier to provide insight on the different elements that interact in secondary schools to help or hinder the reform impulse.

One element that will require serious reflection among all six projects is the question of specific criteria by which to judge reform efforts. Each must pose some answers to the question: "How do we know when a school is reformed, or reforming?" Although a good deal of goal-setting is appropriately left to individual high schools and local districts, some guidance beyond curriculum tightening in specific districts is in order.

One very encouraging note, underscored by Finn, is that singly and together, these projects take in a very sizeable proportion of what could fairly be called the "education establishment." In his words, these investigators and their sponsoring organizations, the consultants and the foundations, are "the

American education mainstream flowing before one's eyes." Although some cynics may regard this as the kiss of death, and those long in the secondary reform movement may be prompted to mutter,"It's about time," the fact that reform is taking hold in the center is additional cause for optimism.

There is a missing element among these projects, however, that is cause for some concern. No one seems to place very much importance on the one condition on which all else hinges: creating the climate for decision, not merely reflecting on the need for action. This point is more fully explored in Part III, but it is worth pausing here to observe that the causes for optimism we have presented are not guarantees for reform. Agreements as to causes and necessary steps are powerful when attached to decisions; alone, they are powerless.

Obstacles to Reform: Caveats

The high school reform movement faces formidable obstacles in the years ahead if inertia, apathy, disappointments, disagreements, and downright opposition are to be overcome. Chester Finn's context-setting was again helpful to the conference participants. One such obstacle is the communications gap that inevitably exists in a system as massive as the American secondary school network (16,000 districts, 27,000 schools, 1.1 million teachers). It is one thing to have six promising national reform efforts going on, sponsored by some very impressive organizations, and staffed by people with very impressive credentials. It is quite another for teachers and principals and school boards to believe that those efforts have something to do with them, with their pupils, and with their communities. We must not lose sight of the fact that the battle for reform will be won in schools -- or lost. Six projects set in the midst of so massive an organization of independent parts could very well become the sources of much productive thought and emulation; their results could just as easily find their place on the ever-lengthening shelf labeled "Ideas Whose Time Came... And Went." To avoid the latter, some fresh ways must be found to tell the story of successful secondary school reform, from one school and one community to another. It would be a tragedy if hard-won victories were to sink from sight simply for lack of clear communications across the front. It would be doubly tragic if the movement now getting underway were to lose not only momentum, but also the enormous leverage available in the convergence of analysis on what's wrong, and how best to remedy it.

Second, the emerging mandates for better performance standards, competency-based testing, and minimum competency requirements for graduation may give a false sense of progress. These are, in Chester Finn's words, "clumsy gauges of proficiency," let alone attainment. Many commentators have pointed out that minimum standards breed minimum accomplishment. As they are

currently being used, these instruments virtually guarantee that high school diplomas are being awarded for ninth grade achievements, and in some cases the standard is lower. Standards must in time be raised and come to conform with the expectations that will be nourished by reform. Mandated standards are no panaceas. They are a tourniquet to staunch the flow of failure until real healing can occur.

Third, there is the danger that the reform movement will be diverted from its proper task by the educational sideshows of "scientific creationism," the ceaseless round of battles over school prayer, the smoldering debate over corporal punishment, and the clamor raised by the book burners and the Philistines, who are convinced that Catcher in the Rye spells the end of Western civilization. In the context of what is at stake in secondary school reform, these are back-seat issues.

High school reform is also threatened by inadequate resources, a problem that is likely to get worse before it gets better, for three reasons: (1) good educational practice is, by its very nature, a labor-intensive activity; (2) this kind of labor may become very expensive, especially in view of the competition for the kinds of skills most needed to make reform effective; and (3) the general condition of the economy inhibits educational expenditure. The upshot of these factors is that those interested in school reform will have to develop the means to pay for it. There is, moreover, every reason to suspect that the quality of teaching is deteriorating, especially when it is widely reported that low-achieving college students go into teaching as a career. It is axiomatic that without better teachers we cannot hope to get better schools. These facts combine to suggest an unpleasant alternative -- sacrifice.

One encouraging consideration on this point is that much of what would contribute to improved academic performance and a more credible secondary school education is relatively cheap. How much would it cost, for example, to increase the classtime devoted single-mindedly to learning? What would it cost a school board to adopt a reforming philosophy like Modesto's? What would it cost a high school to tie student privileges to specified levels of performance? Or to institute higher levels of expectation?

Another obstacle deserves the utmost consideration, especially in the context of the problems described by Kauver, Wingate, and Casteen. There is a viewpoint that has become the virtual credo of many who believe that reform means converting the high school diploma into an admission ticket to a world whose dominant values are set by the marketplace. The schools ought not be gulled by the argument that their job is "preparation for the real world" if "the real world" is defined solely in terms of employability, or by the glib jargon that passes for "communications skills," or by the valuelessness that passes for "realism." The purveyors of this brand of instrumentalism are often more

than a match for reformers who insist on the mastery of subject matter and basic competencies as the standards for school effectiveness. Yet if we listen carefully to responsible voices in the marketplace, we may be able to hear that they are, in fact, crying out to the schools to send them young people who are educated in the best sense of that term.

Finally, and final because the most significant caution deserves the special attention of last mention, there is the obstacle of ideological and political timidity. If we are serious about reforming the secondary schools, teachers and administrators must prepare themselves to take <u>risks</u>, a venture for which neither their professional training nor their sense of responsibility prepares them very well. They must be willing to take the chance that some may unjustly accuse them of elitism, racism, ethnocentrism, and similar crimes. But it will not be possible to make instruction better for all high school children without running reasonable risks. The inherent tension, and it is a healthy tension, between quality in education and equality of educational opportunity guarantees that. But there is no reason to abandon that tension because it threatens to become a loose cannon on the deck of the reform movement; that possibility is all the more reason to guard carefully against the abuse of either one at the hand of the proponents of the other.

If there is a summary lesson in this long list of caveats, it is that when we prepare for secondary school reform, we are not merely preparing for what happens in the school. We are getting ready to play politics.

IV

A MATTER OF POLITICAL WILL

In discussing the issue of secondary school reform, we placed it in a broad historical context, the better to hold out the proposition that the schools be allowed to concentrate on doing what they do well, unencumbered by misplaced expectations. Part II of the discussion gave evidence that there is cause for optimism about reform, suggesting that we really do know a lot of the answers, certainly enough to allow us to get started, although obstacles remain.

What is rarely emphasized in discussions of high school reform, however, is that the problem is primarily political, whereas the solutions thus far advanced are largely educational. This makes for a great deal of miscommunication.

If the participants in the CBE conference had any doubts that they were facing a protracted policy battle in regard to reform, they were quickly disabused by James Enochs's description of the deck-clearing that went on in Modesto in 1976:

> Once we had established that we were in trouble, and that didn't take much convincing, we presented our Board of Education with [our] statement of principles. We had two purposes in mind. First, we wanted our Board on record in support of a significant change in philosophy and direction. In effect, if you can't buy the principles, you'll faint away when you see the program we have in mind. Knowing full well that boards are better on ideas than on practices, we expected and received their unanimous endorsement. (What could they do after we had documented our failures just two weeks before?) Second, we wanted to send a clear signal to students, parents, and staff that we were about to sweep away a lot of conventional wisdom and we were going to do it all at once. No safe little pilot programs, no endless studies, no big committees seeking "input" and "feedback," and tinkering at the edges. One grand swoop. After all, no guts, no glory.[18]

Of course, once the consequences of this drastic program began to be felt, there were recriminations and noises about retreat. The predictable case of cold feet was successfully treated by reminders of how bad things used to be, of the commitment the Board had made to ride the program out, that there

was no alternative, and a strong second dose of the "No Guts, No Glory" argument.

As in Modesto, the creation of a shared commitment to reform in any social district is far less common than agreement on what can work in the classroom. But one thing is abundantly clear. Although the ultimate success of reform must come from the classroom, the climate for reform is a matter of political will.

Luckily, some of the conditions for creating that political will are being set in place. For one thing, every instructional failure sets the stage for it. For another, every decrease in funding for programs is (perversely) a sign of hope for reform, because the power structures gathered around that funding will dissipate and fractionate. It is easier to change when there is less to give up. Some large urban systems, for example, have had as many as sixty different compensatory programs, each with ties to its own funding source. The resulting competition for shrinking funds will curtail the power of local interest groups, and local systems may suffer enough of a shock to allow new priorities.

What may be needed is nothing less (in some cases) than a total reformulation of school policy, one congenial to reform, one that will be carried out at the expense of other, less compelling priorities. At the very least a policy must stand solidly on the proposition that school reform means, primarily, the reform of teaching and learning. It must be not just strongly but passionately oriented to bettering academic achievement in the basic areas widely deemed essential. It must ruthlessly cull school-based programs that have questionable relationships with basic subjects. Such a policy must be highly conscious of standards, set them at high levels, and strive not only to bring students to them, but also to raise them as successes warrant. Each improvement must set the stage for the next.

The political will to reform also means making the conscious choice to allow students to fail -- and to provide for them to try again, with renewed help and different instruction. It will require disciplinary norms that are fair because they are specific, well-understood, and rigorously enforced.

The political will to reform will be characterized by sacrifice, by the sacrifice necessary to hire better teachers, get along without incompetent ones, and train and employ principals who are instructional leaders first. That kind of political will depends on the community from which it must garner the support necessary to sustain it -- Modesto being a case in point.

Finn suggested that community support must include the consumers of high school graduates -- employers, the military, colleges, labor unions, the civil service, etc. -- in the demand for higher academic standards, canons of accountability, and basic skill mastery.

Generating the political will for school reform will also require making it an issue of local politics, not just for school board positions, but for city and county government as well, for fiscal issues, for local offices of many kinds. The point is simply that public officials need to be held accountable for local education at every point where they are able to influence its effectiveness.

The political will for reform will also mean facing the decisions necessary to construct differential pay scales to get the kind of teaching and educational leadership that is required. Better teachers should earn more, as long as all are held to the same standards of accountability.

All these are political choices that go hand in hand. In many cases they precede the political choice about what kind of schooling we want. We can teach children successfully whenever and wherever we choose to do so. What it boils down to is exercising the will to make that choice. After all, the people who want better performance from the schools are the people who pay the bills. As Enochs points out, "It is a worthwhile exercise to remind ourselves occasionally that the schools belong to the people."[19]

The school-community link is crucial here. The Modesto plan was to announce its reform principles clearly and unequivocally to parents, students, and community, saying: this is our program, the performance we expect, the sanctions we will bring, and the people who are in charge and therefore accountable. The schools made it clear that they expected the support of the juvenile justice system to combat truancy, vandalism, and extraordinary discipline problems. They told the community they wanted recognition for outstanding achievements by all students, not just by student athletes. In short, although it was clear in Modesto that delivery on the fourth "R" -- responsibility -- was the job of the schools in the instructional sense, it was equally clear that all were responsible to help create a future that included comprehensive reform.

Countervailing thinking will be entered. One very serious misgiving was stated by the National Institute of Education's Thomas Tomlinson, as he summarized the major themes of the CBE conference. Tomlinson encouraged the participants to ponder the fact that so little action was being taken, nationally, on some common-sense notions. Knowing what's wrong and how to bring about needed changes had not, he seemed to imply, produced commensurate reform. Why?

Tomlinson also raised a caution of his own. Secondary school reform, he warned, should not be achieved, indeed, may not be worth achieving, if it is paid for in the coin of lost student motivation. Put differently, even in a reformed and reforming secondary school, there will be students who remain hard to motivate and who fail. What, he asked, is our responsibility to them? What shall we do for those students for whom academic reform constitutes a major source of further alienation, in this case from the one social institution that is their first -- and perhaps final -- source of hope? Is there a way to be clear and firm about expectations without abandoning young people? Evidence that there are such problems ought to occupy a significant part of the secondary school reform thinking of the next several years, he said.

Another countervailing thought is similarly disquieting. At a national conference sponsored by a nationally prestigious organization, which was attended by influential, articulate, and active participants, high school students were conspicuous by their absence. Perhaps they had better things to do on a school day. But that line of reasoning seems disingenuous, especially in light of the hope John Casteen saw in the minority of students who are working to improve their high schools as educational institutions. Welcoming high school students to the reform movement has much to recommend it. Not to do so smacks of paternalism that may alienate those whom reform is designed to help. As the ultimate consumers of high school reform, students deserve to be consulted, both out of a sense of fairness and as a check against how schools actually function. Students also make good allies for local political contests.

All this leaves a practical question for which there is no easy answer. How do we create the political will for secondary school reform? The only reasonable (and highly unsatisfying) response is the same as the answer to the question of how the tortoise makes long journeys: one step at a time. There are no pat answers, only accounts brought back from the frontier by those brave enough to scout new territory. If there were prefabricated solutions, the main problem would be logistics. Depending on whether the obstacle to political decisionmaking and action is a timid school board, an incompetent superintendent, a lazy principal, or an obstructionist union, different approaches must be attempted and re-attempted. It is finally, however, a matter best expressed by Vincent van Gogh in a letter to his brother, Theo:

> Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together. And great things are not accidental, but must certainly be willed.

This willing cannot be postponed. In the words of the Carnegie Council's 1979 report on high school youth, a third of the young people in this country are "...ill-educated, ill-employed, ill-equipped to make their way in American society." We stand in danger of establishing a permanent underclass in this society, a self-perpetuating culture of poverty that is founded on ignorance and, perhaps worse, on apathy. As we noted at the outset of this report, the educational system of this country was founded on the premise that freedom and ignorance cannot coexist. Either the necessity for freedom defeats ignorance or the inertia of ignorance drags freedom down. America will always have some well-educated people. The unanswered question is whether we will continue producing so many badly educated citizens; whether we are foolish enough to believe that the survival of democracy can be assured by the education of the few; whether we have the political will to assure the education of the many. Creating the political will for reform is a monumentally difficult task, but it can -- it may -- it must -- be done.

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3. A. Harry Passow, Secondary Education Reform: Retrospect and Prospect. New York: Teachers College Press, 1976.

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8. Robert Benjamin, Making Schools Work. New York: Continuum, 1981, p. 89.

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10. For an inspiring story of masterful principalship, the reader is directed to Robert Benjamin's account of the work of Carol Russo at the Garrison School, located in the middle of what is perhaps the country's least congenial environment for reform, New York City's South Bronx. Benjamin, op. cit., pp. 100-123.

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